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Cultural training is basically important to good social and educational adjustment. The Negro has been deprived of his own cultural heritage, and his background has been omitted and distorted by the white society. Consequently, the Negroes' self-esteem has been lowered while whites have accrued an unfounded sense of superiority. Both of these conditions are damaging to the mental health of the country.

Curriculum changes should be encouraged which simply teach the truth. Teachers of both races must strive not to stereotype groups.

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Teaching Negro Culture in High Schools - - Is it Worthwhile?

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Cultural Training and Methods Used to Teach It

There seems to be controversy over the teaching of Negro culture, literature, and history in our high schools. Perhaps most school systems assume that this is already being done, but, if so, they are mistaken, it seems. This sort of material is hardly being taught on any level, elementary, secondary, or collegiate.

There are strong reasons for the failure, we suspect, reasons that lie deep in the fabric of the American society, reasons that have appealed to Negroes and whites alike, though perhaps in different ways. Whatever the reasons, it seems clear that until justice is done in this area, high schools will continue to turn out Negro and white students who are warped by a false picture of the history of their forebears.

It is our purpose in this paper to attempt to provide a peek at the causes and effects of social and school curriculum policies that fail to treat adequately the role of the Negro in American society and history, because it is "controversial." Our further purpose is to suggest a remedy.

This is not to say, however, that *all* school systems fall into this class. The author himself attended a secondary school system that did teach this. It *is* to say, however, that Negro culture is not generally taught and is not generally learned. Even when it is treated, this is not always done from the proper motivation, under the proper circumstances, and with the proper degree of thoroughness. Our basic premise is that the proper teaching of Negro culture and history is one of the few effective ways to motivate Negro students to higher levels of achievement, and at the same time help whites to remove some of their false values, based on ungrounded concepts of their racial superiority. It is one of the few ways of helping both groups toward a greater appreciation of the Negro as a human being, and toward a better understanding of themselves and each other.

Throughout the whole world, cultural training seems to have always been one of the chief functions of societies from time immemorial. No claim has been made that either geography, climate, epoch, degree of civilization, topography, wealth, race or any other factor or group of factors has gotten in the way of this activity of all human societies. Historically, it appears that every means available to one generation to impress on younger ones this cultural continuum has been employed, and more or less effectively.

In our own times, cultures have benefited and continue to benefit from all of these earlier methods. New ones have been developed or utilized, however, as the genius of man has expanded. Therefore it is commonplace to see links made directly or indirectly with the past

by such means as photographs, recordings, radio and television stories, movies and dramas. Furthermore, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, books, and school courses play dramatic roles in this effort. In short, societies seek to transmit the cultural impetus from earlier times by many different approaches, and in depth. Why? Perhaps it is indisputable that one of the key reasons is to promote a feeling of association with earlier generations, to promote a feeling of gratitude and reverence for the heritage that has been passed down. In this way we feel a part of something; we belong to something. We can identify.

To this end, then, millions of dollars are spent annually in historical research and analysis, in such fields as archaeology, geology, anthropology, biology, and the arts. On another level millions are spent for genealogical and historical research by various public and private societies and individuals. A billion dollar business has developed from concentrated commercial efforts to rehash, relive, and glamorize the high achievements of some Western civilizations from the time of the fall of Rome to the latest "shoot-em-up" triumphs over the Indians. So the people of this country use every favorable scrap of information available to them about their predecessors, in order to have this feeling of identification and worth.

This is good, and works fine for the majority. But we find a sharply contrasting picture as it regards the Negro minority in America. Ironically, the forces most to blame, we feel, are the same ones just shown to be so solicitous of their own identification with a glorious past.

The Negro and the Consequences

The Negro American has been stripped of his heritage. He is like Esau without his birthright. He has been placed in the position that, except in a strictly biological sense, he can hardly lay claim to even having an ancestry at all. He has largely been uprooted and sundered and shorn from his cultural tradition. He has been kidnapped and ransomed in every sense of the word imaginable, and culturally murdered. He has been ordered to stand aside and build the road over which the army of history has swept, a history, again ironically, that was begun apparently by his forefathers in his own original homeland. This cleavage has been accomplished so successfully that it is the unusual mature American Negro who has any faint notion as to just who his great grandfather was, except to know that he was very likely white.

This situation has been long apparent, and the sociologists of the thirties and forties, while not the first, did spell it out. The label Negroes bear as the "culturally deprived" really takes the meaning "deprived of their culture."

This has been no accident at all. A very limited analysis of the evidence reveals that as far as treatment of Negro culture and history in America is concerned, three types of sins have been committed. They are sins of commission, of omission, and of distortion. In short, American history has been mistaught as it concerns Negro Americans. It is hard to escape the conclusion that Meyer is correct in his feeling that this mis-teaching is primarily chargeable to the desire of some white Americans to insure and perpetuate "white suprem-

acy."[1] "Strip the Negro of his sense of worth and belonging," the theory must have gone, "and you'll have a manageable chattel." To a large extent, if this was the theory, it appears to have worked.

Aside from all of the separating, punishing, etc., in the first place, whites, aided and abetted later by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, made the social decision that "one drop" of Negro blood determined a Negro. This was a sin of commission. Further, whites decided long before the courts added their approval that the Negro, neither male nor female, had no rights that a white man was bound to respect. It was easy then to inflict on the Negro any and every form of bestial treatment that the imagination and lusts and whims of the slave-owners, slave-merchants, over-seers, guests, and police authorities could devise. Starvation, death, promises, threats, demoralization, disunity, and even some religious teachings had succeeded in changing humans into property.[2]

At the same time, the sins of omission were in motion. For instance, the rulers concealed the fact that it was not in 1619 when Negroes had first come to the New World (and even then as indentured servants and workers, not slaves), but at least as early as 1512, with the Spaniards.[3] This was 108 years before the "Mayflower." Substantiation comes from Franklin,

> Thirty Negroes, including Nuflo de Olano, were with Balboa when he discovered the Pacific Ocean. Cortes carried Negroes with him into Mexico, and one of them planted and harvested the first wheat crop in the New World. Two Negroes accompanied Velas in 1520. When Alvarado went to Quito, he carried two hundred Negroes with him. They were with Pizarro on his Peruvian expedition and carried him to the Cathedral after he was murdered. The Negroes in the expeditions of Almagro and Valdivia saved their Spanish masters from the Indians in 1525.[4]

It was concealed that in the centuries prior to the founding of America, Africans had developed the first civilizations. It was concealed "that Africans first domesticated the sheep, goat, and cow, developed the idea of trial by jury, produced the first stringed instruments, and gave the world its greatest boon in the discovery of iron".[5]

It is still concealed that ancient and famous names like Hannibal, Queen Nefertari, Cleopatra, Aesop, Makeda, Queen of Sheba, and Simon the Cyrenian were those of "Negroes." It has been concealed that famous names of more recent times, like St. Benedict, St. Augustine, Alexandre Dumas (*pere* and *fils*), those of three popes, at least one U. S. president, and perhaps even that of the greatest personage in world music, are names of "Negroes."

The full extent of what has been concealed is probably infinitely more shocking to Negroes than to whites, since it is whites who have done the major part

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[1] Howard N. Meyer, "The Neglected Tool," *The Crisis*, 70:529. (November 1963).

[2] The reader can perceive that details of how this was all accomplished are easily obtainable despite efforts of Negroes and whites alike to suppress them. See standard Negro history texts.

[3] Joel A. Rogers, *Africa's Gift to America*. New York: Futuro Press, 1961, p. 5.

[4] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960, pp. 46.

[5] Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1933, p. 21.

of the suppression of such facts. Even when a name has been mentioned in our texts of a prominent person of Negro ancestry, whites have at *these* times often avoided the racial tag. In this regard we think, for instance, of Pushkin, Frederick Douglass, and Crispus Attucks.

It served the interests of the slave owners much, in addition, to omit reference to facts of Negro history and culture bearing on mutinies, revolts and plots, massacres of whites, the Haitian Revolution, Negro minutemen, and Negro participation in all of the nation's wars (even being the deciding balance of power in both the Revolutionary and Civil wars[6]), lynchings and atrocities, promiscuity, miscegenation, tactical indolence, purposeful sabotage, and the Abolition Movement.

Sins of distortion have also been rampant, it would appear. Here again the generalizations and stereotypes enter, like those of the lazy, happy-go-lucky Negro buck. Odum (who since has changed his opinion) was one of the powerful early twentieth century writers guilty of this sin. Herskovits quotes him as saying,

> The Negro has little home conscience or love of home. . . . He has no pride of ancestry . . . has few ideals . . . little conception of the meaning of virtue, truth, honor, manhood, integrity. He is shiftless, untidy and indolent. . . . The migratory or roving tendency seems to be a natural one to him. The Negro shirks detail and difficult tasks. . . . He does not know the value of his word or the meaning of words in general. . . . The Negro is improvident and extravagant; . . . he lacks initiative; he is often dishonest and untruthful. He is over-religious and superstitious . . . his mind does not conceive of faith in humanity--he does not comprehend it."[7]

Other examples of these sins are easy to come by.

What have been the consequences of these sins of commission, omission, and distortion? Certainly they have had an effect on all American citizens. The hopelessness and helplessness of the modern day Negro in the face of current discriminatory practices in housing, employment, politics, and education is shattering. This is the fruit of about 345 years of oppression in America. The conception that this is a "white man's country" is nearly correct, at least in the sense of where the power lies.

One consequence has been the self depreciation of the Negro. "Throughout the Negro's stay in America," offers Vontress, he has been misrepresented, misjudged, and maligned.[8]

Wolff agrees,

> The group stigma as a means of enforcing a negative self-evaluation on the individual was used with greatest effect against the Negro in American history. . . . The Irish, Jew, Italian, Greek, Chinese, and even Puerto Rican found in himself and in his relationship to the beauty of his land of origin as well as to the glorious history of his group, the strength to counteract and overcome the effects of the stigma.[9]

[6] See Rogers, *op. cit.*

[7] H. W. Odum, "Social and Mental Traits of the Negro," *Columbia University Studies in History, Economy and Public Law.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1910. Quoted in Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past.* New York: Harper & Brother, 1941, p. 22.

[8] Clemmont E. Vontress, "The Negro Against Himself," *Journal of Negro Education*, 32:237-241, Summer, 1963.

[9] Max Wolff (ed.), "Toward Integration of Northern Schools," *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, 36:242, November 1963.

Africa, the root of degradation for the American Negro, has been rejected by him, therefore. He has felt, until very recently, no kinship with Africa or with Africans. He has retained, Herskovits notwithstanding,[10] few if any vestiges of the ancient and highly developed cultures of Africa and has come to the view of his overlords here that Africa is the "dark continent" in both senses. Having lost his cultural attachments to African societies and been denied access to those of the dominant groups here, the American Negro has been hard put to maintain a sense of psychological balance. Some have not succeeded.

> We must begin to realize how many warped, twisted, and distorted personalities there are who will never become inmates of institutions . . . but who will continue in their daily lives exhibiting every form of destructive activity, sabotaging, and defeating human needs and values and obstructing social order while existing under stress and strain and tensions that progressively undermine their health and their capacity for living.[11]

The wonder is that Negroes have been able to adjust to the extent that they have. This self-depreciating and escapist tendency on the part of many Negroes is not likely to subside because of automation, osmosis, or any other mechanistic, scientific or materialistic device. It has made Negroes ashamed to be Negroes, that they count for so little, that they are so despised. They are ashamed because they do not know, for the most part, that they do have cultural roots. They have not learned what they are, and whites have denied or ignored them. This is why Negroes, in order to be "accepted," have acquiesced into feelings of unworthiness even though privately they do feel pride when they learn of Negro accomplishments, so long as they are those of Negroes with whom they are not in immediate competition for white favors and esteem. In this last respect the Negro again proves that he, too, is human. But he is still confused. He often waits to make sure that the white man approves before he dares make any public sign of approbation. It is what James Baldwin describes as a tendency for the Negro, instead of looking upward, to look into the face of the white man, when he is asked if it is raining. This accounts, perhaps, for Warren's experience. He quotes a Negro teacher in Louisiana:

> You hear some white men say they know Negroes. Understand Negroes. But it is not true. No white man ever born ever understood what a Negro is thinking. What he's feeling. . . . And half the time that Negro . . . he don't understand either.[12]

Aside from the long term of bondage and involuntary servitude itself, these sins of commission, omission and distortion have further served to attack directly the ego itself of all these generations of Negroes. This attack is constant and often even unrealized consciously by the whites who make it. Sometimes the defensive mechanisms of the Negro prevent his conscious discernment too of the constancy of such attacks, but the ego never misinterprets. The ego registers every one. It registers the slurring remarks,

[10] Herskovits, *op. cit.*

[11] *Mental Health in the Classroom,* The Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction of the National Education Association. Thirteenth Yearbook, Washington, D. C.: The Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction of the N.E.A., 1940, p. 3.

[12] Robert Penn Warren, *Segregation.* New York: Random House, Inc., 1956, pp. 16-17.

the hastily withdrawn hand, the expressions of avoidance and annoyance, the platitudes of friendship and concern, the hiring and promotional policies, the "racial" job assignments. All form a frontal and formidable attack on his ego.

Nor have these been the only consequences. The ravages on the personality and ego of the Negro show only one side of the coin. Some writers feel that whites have also been "damaged" by the sort of cultural and historical teachings that we have been discussing.

> [They are] being taught to gain personal status in an unrealistic and nonadaptive way. . . . The culture permits and, at times, encourages them to direct their feelings of hostility and aggression against whole groups of people, the members of which are perceived as weaker than themselves.[13]

James Baldwin, in a talk that he called "The Negro Child—His Self Image," made similar comments.

> If . . . one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only Negroes. You'd be liberating white people. . . .
>
> What passes for identity in America is a series of myths about one's heroic ancestors.[14]

Perhaps, then, these sins of historical training, while causing *delusions* among Negroes have caused *illusions* among whites, both damaging to the mental health of the nation. One illustration of the latter possibility might lie in the frustration of many white liberals who cannot understand "why the Negroes can't seem to produce enough good leaders." There are Negroes who might reply that at the same time that these "liberals" are making this complaint, the white power structure, of which they are often a part, is doing everything in its power to render completely ineffective—by bribery, blackmail, threat, force, or murder—any leader worthy of the name.

The Remedy and Conclusions

What is the remedy? As suggested earlier and hinted at periodically the remedy probably lies in education. If miseducation has done the damage, perhaps education can undo some of it, if permitted.

Curriculum changes should be encouraged that would simply teach the truth. Then students, Negro and white, would learn the facts about the Negro in the arts, in general and American culture, in general and American history. Even a small start is something. For instance, one history department distributed to its teachers a fact sheet of dates, names, and events with the request that teachers work the information into their regular presentations. For it seems clear that if teachers are to teach more, they must first learn more. Perhaps an in-service education program is indicated, for both white and Negro teachers, wherever needed.

Thus, by selecting from all of the resources at our disposal for disseminating learning—radio, television, art, literature, ceremonies, recordings, photographs, lectures, newspapers, periodicals, textbooks, and courses—certainly the teacher can soon find *something* to use as a resource.

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[13] Kenneth B. Clark, "Segregated Schools in New York City," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 36:246, No. 6, February 1963.

[14] James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers." From a speech delivered in New York City on October 16, 1963. Published in *Saturday Review*, p. 44, December 21, 1963.

One other understanding that the teacher must have, though, concerns his attitudes about the intelligence and capability of the Negro and particularly of the ones classified as "culturally deprived." Many writers, like Reissman, have cast doubt on the reliability of IQ tests as true measurements.[15] Another recent scientific study goes further, in a different direction:

> There is not sufficient evidence to justify the conclusion that there are native differences between the intelligence of whites and Negroes. The nature of intelligence tests is such that they are incapable of identifying genetic differences between any two groups.[16]

That teachers must be careful how they label groups is further illustrated by a classic example from Senior. He asks, "What group do you think is being discussed?"

> They are satisfied with poor living conditions. . . . They don't want modern facilities. . . . They won't use bath tubs. . . . They don't want to change their standards. . . . They're destructive and overspend money. . . . We've known about any number of illegitimate children who have moved into already overcrowded homes with mother. I recall a family with thirteen children of its own. Sister has four illegitimate children. . . . — and so forth.[17]

Senior answers his question by revealing that this discussion is "of the purest 'Nordics' in the United States: the white, Protestant, individualistic Southern mountaineer, in Cincinnati. . . ."[18]

If teachers will teach more of the truth, the solution is perhaps in sight, for this may lead to a corresponding rise in the Negro's self-esteem. With greater self-esteem the Negro secondary school youth may become more teachable, the white youth more understanding and appreciative. This is not guaranteed, but is it worth a try?

But the questioner asks, "Why can't the Negro child's parents teach him his history and give him motivation?" It's a good question, but overlooks the fact that many Negro parents can't. They can't teach what they don't know. They can't motivate what they don't feel. One writer calls them "only an older generation of the disadvantaged. . . . The problem of the educator is to break the vicious circle."[19]

The Negro teachers alone cannot accomplish this, if for no other reason than that they are too few. Woodson offers a more potent reason.

> Taught from books of the same bias, trained by Caucasians of the same prejudices or by Negroes of enslaved minds, one generation of Negro teachers after another has served for no higher purpose than to do what they are told to do.[20]

This statement, whether true or not, runs the risk of inflaming many a Negro teach-

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[15]Virgil A. Clift, Review of *The Culturally Deprived Child and His Education*, by Frank Reissman, *Journal of Negro Education*, 32:152, Spring 1963.

[16]Melvin M. Tumin, *Race and Intelligence — A Scientific Evaluation*. New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1963, pp. 13-33.

[17]Clarence Senior, *Strangers — Then Neighbors: From Pilgrims to Puerto Ricans*, New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1961, p. 17.

[18]*Ibid.*

[19]Ronald Rousseve, "Teachers of Culturally Disadvantaged American Youth," *Journal of Negro Education*, 32:114, Spring 1963. To a remarkable degree the Jews, with stronger economic resources and unbroken traditional heritage, have been able to do this in the synagogue and in the home.

[20]Woodson, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

er. Undoubtedly, however, few Negro teachers have had the chance to learn very much of Negro culture and history.

What about the mental health of the teacher, Negro and white alike? With apparently little or no help currently available, in terms of what to do for the disadvantaged youngster, is the teacher's mental health unassailable? The problem looms particularly for the "white, college youngsters having the advantages of economic and family security, early primed for middle class success,—who in great numbers will teach in the 'slum schools.'"

To combat the corrosive effects of centuries of human bondage, denial, and the ghetto, what other practicable alternative have we? Is this suggested program, to incorporate the teaching of Negro culture in the secondary school curriculum, worthwhile? Shall we try it and see? One thing is certain. Even if this were to work, it is extremely doubtful that this alone would suffice. Our educational system and our society must do all of the other things at the same time.

Conclusions

1. Cultural training is basically important to good social and educational adjustment.

2. Society normally uses many means to effect this sort of training.

3. In the case of the Negro, society has been remiss. Consequently, the self-esteem of the Negro has nearly been bred out of him, while on the other hand whites have been led into an ungrounded sense of superiority. Both of these conditions are damaging to the mental health of the country.

4. One effective remedy may be to incorporate such training into appropriate places in the secondary school curriculum.